

Good evening everyone. My name is Emily Root and I am a sophomore mechanical engineering student at the University of Connecticut. I am originally from Thomaston, CT, which for those of you who aren't familiar with Thomaston, has a population of about 8,000 people. That is over four times smaller than the population of UConn. Needless to say, it was a pretty big decision to go from a small town lifestyle to being part of a pretty large university. However, with that being said, I decided to come to UConn because I loved the campus and the opportunities, both engineering-wise and socially, but also because it made the most sense financially. I was the valedictorian of my high school class which meant that when I graduated, UConn offered me the Presidential Scholarship. This scholarship guaranteed me four years of free tuition. This scholarship was a big pull for me to come to UConn and I can honestly say it was one of the deciding factors of me staying in state for college.

Once I made my decision, I was very eager to start my new journey. Leaving my small town and moving to college was something that really excited me, but it also terrified me because I didn't know how I was going to find my place in a community that was much bigger than anything I had ever been a part of before. However, the doubts I had before seem almost silly now because over the past two years, UConn has become my home away from home. Getting involved and using the programming at UConn was one of the ways that I was able to determine where I fit and what I wanted to do with my time here. Just to highlight a few of the programs I have been involved with over the past two year, I was a member of the UConn Marching Band, Disney Club, and my friends and I will have some fun on the weekends by signing up for some of the events hosted by the Student Undergraduate Body of Governors (SUBOG).

Prior to moving to campus, I took part in the BRIDGE program, which is run by the Vergnano Institute for Inclusion (VII) which is a diversity outreach center for underrepresented students in the field of engineering. The thought of having to do an academic based summer program during my last summer before college started did not seem like a great idea at the time, but I cannot express how impactful the decision to take part in the BRIDGE program was for my time at UConn. This program altered the path I thought I was going to take in college in the best way possible. I have been recommended for leadership opportunities in other organizations, found a job on campus that I thoroughly enjoy, made an extremely strong community of friends, and found confidence in myself and my capabilities that I would have had a hard time discovering on my own.

I wanted to conclude by saying that being a female in the field of engineering, while it is getting better and companies and universities are becoming more diverse, it can be intimidating to speak up in a room full of people who have been seen as "superior" throughout history. UConn and VII, specifically, have given me a community of people who are in the same situation. My view of the world has changed for the better because of the time I have spent with the people in the UConn community. I have learned that I shouldn't have to feel afraid to speak up in front of a room full of men because I belong to be here just as much as anyone else. While I don't know if I will stay in Connecticut or end up somewhere completely different after college, I do know that with the experiences I have gained from VII and all of the opportunities here at the University of Connecticut, I will be a better, more educated member of the company I work for and the community I choose to call home. Thank you for your time.